

EUROPEAN CENTER FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS



PRESS RELEASE

Sri Lanka violates United Nations Convention on Discrimination against Women

*ECCHR is pressing the UN to carry out inquiries specifically into the
situation of women and girls in northern and eastern Sri Lanka*

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Berlin, June 2012 – The European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) has contacted three Special Rapporteurs as well as a Working Group of the United Nations. It is calling on them to conduct further investigations into the plight of women and girls in the northern and eastern Sri Lanka and to remind the country of its international obligations.

Since the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka in mid-May 2009, there has been an increased military presence in northern and eastern regions of the country. The number of assaults in women and girls in these regions has simultaneously risen with and is attributable to the increased number of military and police members. In its complaint, ECCHR points out the extent to which these violent acts and ongoing impunity are closely linked to the anti-terrorism law called the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). This law from the 1970s, modified in 2011, makes it easier for police and military members to carry out body inspections and ‘searches’ without having to justify doing so. These searches are often carried out alongside sexual harassment and violence that is specifically of a sexual nature.

The northern and eastern regions of the country are swamped with checkpoints and military stations. Women have to pass by these points mostly alone and must therefore run the risk of exposing themselves to harassment, threats and assault by the military. Furthermore, the military are increasingly taking over police duties. Women and girls would have to make complaints directly to the perpetrators and therefore avoid speaking out due to fear of stigmatization, threats and possible further attacks. Prosecution therefore fails to take place.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Convention), it is internationally recognized that violence on the grounds of gender is a form of discrimination. Sri Lanka ratified this agreement and is thus currently disregarding the obligation it accepted to, to fight any forms of discrimination and to ensure the effective prosecution of perpetrators of gender-based violence. It is therefore required to eliminate all laws that may lead to direct or indirect forms of discrimination.

ECCHR therefore requests the United Nations to refer Sri Lanka to its obligations under international law with regard to gender-specific violence against women and girls in ‘investigations’ by Sri Lankan state employees, and to encourage Sri Lanka to reconcile the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) with the CEDAW Convention.

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